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ARTICLES:

(1) Tokyo takes unfreezing bank accounts as having "certain level of

significance" in order to achieve progress on talks, but some in Tokyo concerned about America's now softened position

YOMIURI (Page 2) (Full)  
Eve., March 19, 2007

The Japanese government is calmly taking the move to unfreeze (North Korea's) bank accounts as a necessary action in order to achieve progress in the six-party talks. But some officials in the government, seeing America's attitude toward North Korea as easing more than expected, voiced concern that a future discord could arise between Japan, which still has the abduction issue to resolve, and the United States.

At a press briefing this morning, Chief Cabinet Secretary Shiozaki noted: "It's a good thing to put an end to the (frozen bank-accounts issue). There is a certain degree of significance in terms of preparing an environment for the six-party talks to move forward. We hope to see overall talks move in a good direction."

While North Korea's Vice Foreign Minister Kim Gye Gwan had insisted on a full unfreezing of his country's bank accounts, it had been unclear how many bank accounts would be unfrozen. In part because of this, at one point concern grew in Tokyo that "the six-party talks could be in danger." But with the US and North Korea reaching agreement now, the next round of six-party talks is expected to take place as scheduled. Tokyo has now taken this situation as "having turned the corner on the issue."

An aide to Prime Minister Abe, however, said that when it came to how many bank accounts would be unfrozen, "accurate information from the US was not easily available to us." One government official also

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noted: "It's strange to unfreeze such bank accounts that were recognized as being used by North Korea for money laundering."

(2) Editorial: US must remain committed to its North Korea policy's basic principle

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 2) (Full)  
March 16, 2007

The US Department of the Treasury announced its decision on March 14 to end some of its financial sanctions on North Korea. Ahead of the six-party talks resuming March 19, the United States has given a carrot to North Korea in order to accelerate nuclear talks with North Korea. However, Pyongyang seems unwilling to dole out its "first steps" to abandon its nuclear development programs unless the United States lifts all of its sanctions. We do not want the United States to play into the hands of North Korea with further compromises, and we strongly hope that the United States' policy of "dialogue and pressure" will not be watered down.

The Bush administration was in a position to call for "a complete, verifiable and irreversible dismantling of North Korea's nuclear weapons programs (CVID)." It has strongly supported Japan's stance of seeking to resolve the issue of Japanese nationals abducted to North Korea. However, the Bush administration-currently fettered with Iraq's postwar settlement and Iran's nuclear program-is being criticized at home and abroad for wavering in the basic principles of its policy toward North Korea. If the Bush administration pursues superficial results with immediate makeshift measures, it could result in marring the relationship of mutual trust between Japan and the United States and spoiling the United States' international prestige.

In September of the year before last, the US Treasury Department said North Korea had been committing international economic crimes, such as counterfeiting US dollar bills and trafficking in drugs. The US Treasury Department therefore designated one of North Korea's outposts for such crimes, Banco Delta Asia (BDA), a Macao-based bank, as a major moneylaundering center. In response, Macanese authorities took action to freeze about 25 million dollars in North Korean bank accounts.

The US Treasury Department, in its action taken this time, prohibited US banking institutions from doing business with BDA, acknowledging that BDA has done nothing about North Korea's illegal acts. Meanwhile, the United States entrusted Macanese authorities with the frozen money and accepted a de facto decision to unfreeze North Korean bank accounts. Macanese authorities are expected to release about 10 million dollars as crime-free money.

At first, the Bush administration was in a position to crack down on economic crimes apart from the six-party talks. North Korea demanded that the United States should call off its financial sanctions to resume the six-party talks. The United States rejected the North Korean demand. However, the United States changed course after holding talks with North Korea in Berlin in January. This time, the United States went ahead with unfreezing some North Korean bank accounts in return for the resumption of the six-party talks in February.

Last month, the six-party talks reached an agreement. That agreement, however, was suspected to be a product of the Bush administration's "treachery." The agreement would provide North

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Korea with fuel oil amounting to one million tons in exchange for the shutdown of North Korea's nuclear facilities in Yonbyong. The agreement did not specify anything about North Korea's existing nuclear weapons and plutonium stock. It also fails to make clear what should be done about North Korea's secret development of nuclear weapons from enriched uranium.

Though a key player, the Bush administration is now wavering in its actions, so North Korea's abandonment of its nuclear ambitions may end up pie in the sky. Tokyo should remind Washington that Japan is neither likely to aid nor normalize relations with North Korea unless it first dismantles all its nuclear facilities and the abduction issue is resolved. Japan should call on the Bush administration to uphold its basic principles.

(3) CIA Director Hayden to visit Japan on March 21; Might meet here with Iraqi vice president

SANKEI (Page 5) (Full)  
March 17, 2007

US Central Intelligence Agency Director Michael Hayden will visit Japan for several days from March 21 to exchange views with Foreign Minister Taro Aso on the North Korean and Iraqi situations, Sankei learned on March 16.

Aso is expected to exchange views with Hayden on the situation in Iraq, keeping in mind the submission to the Diet before the end of March of a bill revising the Iraq Special Measures Law. The government intends to make a final decision on the submission of the revised bill to the Diet based on intelligence provided by Hayden.

Iraqi Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi (Sunnis) also will arrive in Tokyo on March 21. In April, Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, a member of the Shiite sect, which has increased its confrontation with the Sunnis, will visit Japan. The government hopes to receive high praise from major Islamic religious groups in Iraq for Japan's Air Self-Defense Force (ASDF) troops' transport operations.

The government is watching to see if there will possibly be contact between Hayden and al-Hashimi during the visits.

(4) Thomas Kreutzer to arrive at consular post in July

OKINAWA TIMES (Page 26) (Full)  
March 17, 2007

Thomas M. Kreutzer, who is scheduled to become a consul at the US Consulate General in Naha in July, recently visited the prefecture to make preparations for taking on his position. After having served at the US Consulate General in Osaka and other posts, he is currently studying Japanese at the US Department of State Japanese Language and Area Training Center.

His area of responsibility in Okinawa will include public relations, cultural affairs, economics, and trade. He has studied Japanese on his own, as well. "I have long wanted to work in Okinawa. Okinawa is an important place with which we have long had a valuable relationship." He is looking forward to assuming his duties this summer.

(5) Column reporter's eye: My message to Japan on wartime comfort women issue; Japan must be modest toward victims and seek

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reconciliation with former comfort women from a broader perspective

MAINICHI (Page 6) (Full)  
March 16, 2007

By Toshimitsu Kishi, reporter with the Arts and Cultural News Department

In the wake of the rekindling of the issue of Japan's wartime comfort women, many may wonder why historical issues have yet to be resolved. Former Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama, president of the Asian Women's Fund (AWF), which will be dissolved at the end of March, stressed at his last press conference as AWF president that the government should continue to warmly watch over the wartime comfort women. I have had to face up to this difficult issue, as if boarding the last bus, since three years ago I took part in a seminar as a lecturer under University of Tokyo Prof. Yasuaki Onuma, one of the organizers of the AWF. What kind of message should Japan send? I want to look for ways for an amicable settlement of the issue without losing sight of the overall picture.

In this column on Feb. 9, 2005, I introduced readers to the seminar, which was held for one year, inviting various guest speakers. The seminar was able to tap a wide spectrum, including President Murayama, scholars, and those involved in the AWF. The seminar also invited persons from both the right and the left wings, who are critical of the AWF. Last November I covered the final symposium of the fund. As American panelists predicted following the victory of the Democratic Party in the mid-term (congressional) elections, the comfort women issue has now been brought before the US Congress.

Views of the three historians invited to the seminar were split over the question of whether there was coercion toward women.

Their views as summarized were: (1) it clear from existing documentary material that the Japanese Imperial Army was deeply involved in the recruitment, transfer and management of the comfort women, and so it is advisable to consider the testimonies of individuals; (2) the women were not forcibly taken like slaves being rounded up, but were recruited through normal ways; and many of individual crimes, including rapes, were punished; and (3) the comfort-women system was created mainly by the military on its own, but conditions for sexual violence and the brokers who came with the system should be seen as problems.

When I asked if they had any documents, one of them responded: "Nobody writes about coercion in official documents." Chances are slim that documents that show conclusive evidence will ever be discovered. What is more difficult is there will remain gaps in translations even through accurate historical study.

The government interviewed 16 former comfort women. In 1993, then Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono released a statement acknowledging that the women were forced to work as such during wartime. Nobuo Ishihara, former deputy chief cabinet secretary, who was involved in drafting the Kono Statement, made the same comment in the seminar and in a recent interview:

"We were unable to find documents that proved coercion. Based on the testimonies, we arrived at that conclusion as a consensus in the cabinet. I do not think they (the 16 former comfort women) told us fictitious stories."

According to the government, the interviews were conducted with the cooperation of the South Korean government in an environment under which the former comfort women would not feel any pressure, based on the condition that the interviews would not be released to the public. It is regrettable that the documents that were key to the government's decision were not disclosed. However, Japan cannot risk endangering the identities of the victims, who have lived by hiding their painful pasts in a society still under strong Confucian influence.

Are there any ways to fill the gaps? When I heard the word "senbu," which means to have people in an occupied territory understand the purpose of the mainland's policy and thus put them at ease, I thought I was convinced. There were some reasons for the necessity of comfort women. But the main reason was to contain anti-Japanese sentiments intensified by the soldiers' assaults on the Korean Peninsula. Today, sexual crime committed by troops stationed in a country would evoke the wrath of the citizens.

When the controversy recently erupted in the United States and not in the countries concerned, what came to my mind was a speech delivered at the seminar by Yuzo Yokota, a member of the United Nations sub-commission on human rights. He said that it is the interpretation of classic international law that the peace treaty between nations and the bilateral treaty rule out the right of claim as sought by the former comfort women, but he added that there still remains room to debate the right to claim by individuals. Yokota's idea was that since the universality of human rights transcends place, country and the times, Japan's explanation that problems during World War II have been resolved is not enough.

When I asked Yokota about the background for the US Congress' current move, he responded that there were activities by non-governmental organizations in the background. He pointed out:

"The US Congress' move shows that the time has come for those interested in human rights to act in global terms. Unless Japan comes up with policy measures that meet such solidarity, the issue will probably continue to remain unresolved."

It is true that US media reports on the comfort woman issue raise questions. Following the Kono statement, the Asian Women's Fund was set up. The fund is a new system under which the government and private citizens shared war responsibility for the comfort women. I think appreciation should be given to successive prime ministers Ryutaro Hashimoto, Keizo Obuchi, Yoshiro Mori, and Junichiro Koizumi for sending letters of apology to the former "comfort women." The letters stated:

"The government of Japan sincerely apologizes and expresses remorse from the bottom of its heart for all those who experienced as comfort women many hardships and suffered wounds that will never be healed. "

I think what is important for Japan as the aggressor to be careful about what it says. Looking at the many elderly persons who participated in a meeting held after former Prime Minister Murayama's press conference, I felt the passage of time. Taking those efforts and limits into consideration, I will start doing what I can do to help.

(6) Chinese president tells LDP secretary general Prime Minister Abe should make efforts to improve relations with China, resolving

Yasukuni issue

SANKEI (Page 5) (Full)  
March 17, 2007

Yasushi Sugimoto, Beijing

Ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) Secretary General Hidenao

Nakagawa and New Komeito Secretary General Kazuo Kitagawa met with Chinese President Hu Jintao on March 16 at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. During the meeting, President Hu told the two party officials, "Good relations are continuing" between Japan and China. However, he indirectly sought to constrain a possible visit to Yasukuni Shrine by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and to check Abe's recent remarks on the comfort-women issue. Hu told the two secretaries general of the ruling parties: "(The prime minister)

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should deal appropriately with important and delicate issues and make efforts to improve our healthy bilateral relationship."

Nakagawa, in turn, asked Hu to cooperate with Japan in resolving North Korea's abductions of Japanese nationals, as well as the issue of China's gas exploration in the East China Sea. Hu expressed hopes for an early settlement of the gas exploration issue. Regarding the abduction issue, he only went so far as to say, "I hope that Japan and North Korea will resolve it appropriately through dialogue."

Nakagawa handed to Hu a letter from Abe inviting the president to Japan. Hu tried to play up friendly ties between Japan and China, refraining from remarks criticizing Japan.

(7) Rate of successful tenders in ODA projects tops 99% : JCP  
lawmaker Kobayashi pursues suspected bid-rigging over ODA projects

AKAHATA (Page 2) (Full)  
March 17, 2007

Japanese Communist Party (JCP) lawmaker Mieko Kobayashi during an Upper House Budget committee meeting on Mar. 16 raised questions about suspected bid-rigging activities in Foreign Ministry (MOFA)-sponsored official development assistance (ODA) projects.

She turned up the heat on the actual situation of bidding for grant-aid projects in general related to the basic-human-needs area, which accounts for 40% of grant aid cooperation. Japanese companies are eligible to bid for grant aid projects. She pointed out that the successful tenders, as indicated by the ratio of contracted prices to estimated prices, came to more than 99% in 179 out of 203 projects for the construction of facilities during the period from fiscal 2003 to the middle of the fiscal 2006.

If such a ratio tops 95%, there is the possibility of bid-rigging activities. Kobayashi fired up her offensive, saying, "Fiscal resources are taxpayers' money. What is your view on that the rate of successful tenders being so extremely close to the estimated prices?" Foreign Minister Aso dodged the question, saying, "Construction sites are such where one-third of construction materials brought from Japan disappear over night. Companies taking part in such projects will go into the red, unless they set the estimate higher." Kobayashi pointed out the need to check whether there were bid-rigging practices or not.

She also pursued the abnormally high ratio of discretionary contracts, pointing out that 29 contracts or 38% of contracts in

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fiscal 2004 and 26 cases or 44% in fiscal 2005 were discretionary contracts. Quoting an article on a remark made by an executive of a general construction company that in order to make contracts at the highest possible prices, construction companies offer tenders with prices higher than estimated prices so that discretionary contracts are adopted." Koro Bessho, director general of the International Cooperation Bureau of MOFA, said, "We are dealing with bidding in a strict manner."

Kobayashi called for a drastic improvement in transparency about the bidding situation, saying, "Japan's general construction contractors may find opportunities to make profits overseas with taxpayers' money as funding resources."

(8) Air in the Abe administration: Lawmakers elected for first time in 1993 share zeal for reform and urge to steer helm of government

Epoch-making events took place in the political community in 1993.

Following the loss of a no-confidence vote by the cabinet of Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa, now 87, a general election took place. Such new parties as the Japan Renewal Party, the Japan New Party, and the New Party Sakigake (Harbinger) made big leaps in the election at the height of the "new party boom." Eight non-LDP parties also launched an administration of Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa, now 69, opening the door to an age of reform following the collapse of the so-called "1995 structure." 1955 was the year in which the Liberal Democratic Party was established and began its long period of single party rule, with the Japan Socialist Party (JSP) becoming the permanent opposition party.

The political career of Shinzo Abe, 52, also started that year in which the Liberal Democratic Party became an opposition party.

In the following year, the Diet passed political reform legislation to introduce a single-seat constituency system. In view of the fact that the Meiji Restoration came 15 years after the arrival of the "black ships," Masaharu Gotoda, a man of wisdom, predicted that it would take 15 years for reform to bear fruit and usher in a new age.

It has been 13 years since then. And Abe is now prime minister. Under the single-seat system in which political parties clash head on with each other, having high national popularity is essential for party heads, who serve as faces of elections. Abe would not have been prime minister if it were not for the changes in 1993.

The lineup of LDP members who won Diet seats for the first time in 1993 include Yasuhisa Shiozaki, 56, who is currently chief cabinet secretary. Such individuals as Seiji Maehara, 44, Kiyoshi Ueda, 58,

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and Yukio Edano, 42, were also elected to the Diet for the first time as ruling party members. Makiko Tanaka, 63, and Akihiro Ota, 61, currently representative of the New Komeito, also emerged on the political scene.

Minshuto (Democratic Party of Japan) lawmaker Maehara, who became party head in the fall of 2005 ahead of Abe, joined the Matsushita Institute of Government and Management (MIGM) after graduating from Kyoto University. From the thinking of Konosuke Matsushita, the MIGM's founder, Maehara has learned of a sense of mission to change the Kasumigaseki bureaucratic district devoid of a sense of business

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management. Maehara won the party's presidency owing to his youthfulness. At the same time, he was forced last year to take responsibility for a fake e-mail fiasco due to his lack of experience.

Maehara's office was right next to Abe's in the Dietmembers' Office Building. They dined together often when they were rookies. Taking strong interests in diplomatic and security affairs, both Abe and Maehara also joined the parliamentary group to consider the security of the new century.

Although Maehara thinks Abe's view on the right to collective self-defense is idealistic, his position is similar to those of junior LDP lawmakers. Maehara takes this view: "In the event an emergency situation occurred under a Minshuto-led administration, we cannot wait for constitutional revision. We must deal with such a situation flexibly."

Maehara also actively addressed the issue of public works projects. Earlier, Prof. Masataka Kosaka, Maehara's teacher at Kyoto University, had advised the lawmaker on a Shinkansen bullet train to address the issue actively.

Maehara consequently drafted a bill to totally freeze dam projects, but it was scrapped in the end. Maehara explained the difference between Abe and himself this way: "The question is whether Abe has

the will to break with the bureaucracy. The LDP would never be able to do that."

Ueda has emerged as a Minshuto debater good at grilling government

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offices with accurate data. Ueda became governor of Saitama in 2003.

The following conversation took place in an elevator of a Dietmembers' Office Building:

Abe: "You are working for the worthy cause."

Ueda: "What's that?"

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Ueda was opposing the idea of granting local suffrage to foreign

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residents. Abe was alluding to it. Ueda, who used to be a member of the parliamentary group on the abduction issue, took this view: "Anti-war peace education seem to partially overlap with anti-Japanese education." There seem some similarities between Abe and Ueda. But Ueda added: "We differ from there. Mr. Abe eyes restoring the old ways, but I think Japan should come up with new national objectives."

Ueda's office is filled with graphs and charts showing numerical

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progress on prefectural reforms from a perspective of business management. Ueda had prefectural officials stealthily hand municipality-specific tax payment rates to local heads, and this helped increase the rates out of local rivalry.

Edano is the ace of the Minshuto lawmakers of the post-ideology generation. Edano successfully ran in the 1993 race on the ticket of the now-defunct Japan New Party in his second year as a lawyer, and he also supported former Health and Welfare Minister Naoto Kan, 60, during the HIV-tainted blood scandal.

"Today, people are looking for ways to fix social problems, such as education, Japan's defense capabilities, and the Constitution."

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Edano, known as a member of the new policy breed, has taken part in small meetings along with Abe, but the two have not closely discussed anything specific. Abe boasts the Defense Agency's upgrade to ministry status and talks about the need to revise the Fundamental Law of Education, but those topics are over in the eyes of Edano. Edano thinks Abe has sent out ideological messages only because he does not have any specific policies.

Those members, who were born from the excitement of the changes in 1993 and have experienced in both the ruling and opposition camps, seem to share the urge to steer the helm of government.

SCHIEFFER